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Canadians' Family Meal Status: A Comparison between Anglophones and Francophones

Davod Ahmadi[1*], Patrick Cortbaoui[2], & Hugo Melgar-Quiñonez[2]

[1] Université Laval, Québec City, Québec, Canada

[2] McGill Institute for Global Food Security, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

[*] Davod Ahmadi, Sociology Université Laval, Québec City, Québec, Canada

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Abstract

In this paper, we studied Anglophones and Francophones' family meal such as, frequency of family meals, shopping for groceries, selecting foods based on nutrition labels, personal cooking abilities, and types of foods used when preparing meals. We also investigated the association between the amounts of minutes eating meals at home and some socio-demographic characteristics. Data from Canadian Community Health Survey: Food Skill 1 on 2012 and General Social Survey: Time Use was analyzed. A decreasing trend was found for the more amount of time spent on meals at home for Anglophones and Francophones in the last two decades. However, Francophones still spent more amounts of time on meals at home compared to their Anglophone counterparts.

Keywords

family meal, English and French Canadians, meal times

1. Introduction

For most Canadians, eating is an important part in their everyday lives. Eating together contributes to social relationships which in food sharing is an almost universal medium for expressing fellowship, hospitality, and compassion. However, eating alone is becoming common in Canada (Fieldhouse, 2015).

Family meals seem to be affected by changes such as, traditional housekeeping role, in both developed and developing societies (Pettinger et al., 2006). The home is no longer prescribed as the primary place where food should be consumed (Valentine, 1999). In fact, meals are increasingly being eaten in restaurants or other institutions, such as schools or workplace cafeterias. Many children, for instance, do not eat suitable family meals partly due to their parents' employment status, as well as the

availability of convenience foods, such as frozen microwavable dinners (Leslie, 1995). Therefore, traditional food patterns and practices have been evolving, and creating new family organizational structures through women's employment opportunities, work roles and time scarcity (Bisogni et al., 2007).

Family meals are also influenced by diverse cultural values and these values are among the greatest determinants of family eating patterns. For instance, patterns of daily food intake and rules regarding the serving and presentation of meals are different across various cultures (Chiva, 1997). Though not all cultures eat around a table, all cultures do have rules and customs regulating the arrangement of commensalism, distribution and sharing, as well as appropriate table manners (Fischler, 2011). The increased consumption of pre-packaged convenience foods has also propagated a tendency towards unstructured food events. This tendency has been called "grazing" and has been judged by some to be an unhealthy eating habit (Warde, 1997). Grazing is a unique characteristic of industrial societies, which encourages more individualistic eating habits in 20th and 21st centuries. By focusing on structural individualism and individualistic cultural values, Sobal (2000) argues that individuals in preindustrial societies did not have absolute autonomy, values and Allik and Realo (2004) note that religious and cultural values prohibited the development of individualistic values. However, in post-industrial societies, individualistic values contribute to social isolation and alienation which lead to more frequent occurrences of eating alone. In fact, time spent on eating has been declining over the years and the composition of meals has been simplified by the growing availability and importance of sandwiches, snacks, and fast foods. Although mealtimes still structure some social time, they currently do so in a much more flexible manner (Fischler, 2011). Over time, individualism has been directing people towards convenience foods, which in the long-term can create greater incidence of chronic illnesses (Sobal & Nelson, 2003).

This paper tends to see how eating meals in family, as an everyday activity, is constructed in Canada, as a modern country, between Anglo and Franco-Canadians. The importance for studying both languages groups is to see whether if there are similarities and dissimilarities between Anglophones and Francophones. In Canada, Francophones are "North Americans" who speak French, and as such they are different from French people. However, Francophone Canadians have some cultural similarities with French people, such as similar religious traditions, valuing strong united families' orientation (Murphy, 1981) and communities (Ross, 1954) (Note 1). Specifically, we want to know whether if amount of minutes spent on family meals is declining in Canada or not.

In terms of the difference between Anglo and Franco-Canadians, it should be note that they believed to have quite different sets of values. Influenced by Catholic tradition, French-Canadian culture used to recognize as oriented toward the group, while the English-Canadian outlook exemplifies the Protestant ethic, with an emphasis upon the individual (Henderson et al., 1970). Hamelin et al. (1999) argued that Francophones in Quebec share Latin culture that give particular importance to lifestyle, including the

pleasure of eating and sharing food. This idea is confirmed by Michon and Chebat (2004) who argued Francophones who are more hedonistic than English Canadians. In consideration of family meal, a study indicated that meals are served both at noon and evening in Quebec homes (Mallen, 1973).

2. Method

2.1 Data

Two different data were used for this study. First is from the "Canadian Community Health Survey: Rapid-Response Food Skills 1 (CCHS: RR_FS1), 2012", which contain 10,098 adult respondents with or without children. The CCHS: RR_FS1 modules on food skills were conducted in November-December of 2012 and were aimed to strengthen the understanding of food skills in Canada while providing baseline data for monitoring population trends (Statistics Canada, 2012). Baseline data for descriptive analyses were weighted for this data according to Statistics Canada's specifications to represent the Canadian population (Refer to Appendix).

To categorize respondents into one of the two language sub-cultures, we used the language variable entitled "First language learned and still understood". Only those respondents who answered French or English were included in this study.

Second is data from General Social Survey: Time Use (GSS: Time Use) surveys (1992, 1998, 2005 and 2010). These surveys monitor changes in Canadians' living conditions, in general, and the amount of time they spend on daily activities. Similarly, the samples were divided into two cultural language groups according to responses to the following question: "First childhood language of respondent".

2.2 Descriptive Variables

To show both language groups' frequency of family meals, two questions were used: "How often do you usually eat at home for the main meal (Note 2)?" (Never/about once a week=0, almost every day/about 2 or 3 times a week=1, every day=2), and "When at home, how often do you usually eat the main meal with your family sitting at the table together?" (Never/about once a week=0, almost every day/about 2 or 3 times a week=1, every day=2).

Further, the reasons for not helping or making meals in the household the following question: "What would you say is the main reason why you rarely or never prepare or help to prepare meals?" Nine potential reasons for making no making or helping for making meals were presented, including a category called "Other".

To measure level of planning before grocery shopping, respondents were asked, "When shopping for groceries, do you sometimes: 1) "Have a budget on how much you can spend", 2) "Use a written grocery list", 3) "Plan meals before going to the store".

Use of nutrition as a criterion for selecting foods is measured by the following question: "When shopping for groceries, do you sometimes select foods based on nutrition labels?" Responses were coded 0=No and 1=Yes.

To identify the type of food most used when preparing meals, respondents were asked the following: When preparing the main meal at home, which of the following does your family do the most often: 1) "You use mostly whole, basic foods such as vegetables, fruits, pasta, legumes and meat", 2) "You use mostly easy to prepare foods such as frozen lasagna", 3) "You use a mix of whole, basic foods and easy to prepare foods" and 4) "You buy ready-to eat food or order takeout or delivery"(Note 3).

2.3 Outcome and Exposure Variables

By using the second data (GSS), the following measure were used as dependent variables: "Total minutes for meals at home (including take-out eaten at home)". The number of minutes was recoded into eight ordinal categories; for meal at home, the categories were 0-15, 16-30, 31-45, 46-60, 61-75, 76-90, 91-105, 106-highest. Socio-demographic variables such as, language, gender, education, marital status and household income variables were used as intendent variables.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

Different statistical analyses formed the basis of this paper. First, descriptive analyses were carried out to explore the time spent on meals at home, frequency of family meal, reasons for not participating in family meal, cooking skills, nutrition label, food shopping, and type of food when cooking. Second, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to explore the mean of the time spent on meals at home and socioeconomic factors such as, sex, age, level of education, marital status, employment status and level of family income. Finally, unadjusted and adjusted linear regressions were used to explore the association between independent and dependent variables.

3. Results

3.1 Socioeconomic Characteristics

An almost equal proportion of men and women responded to the survey. About half were between the ages of 40 and 74, and 33% of the Anglophones versus 27% of the Francophones had a bachelor's degree or above. Approximately 55% of both Anglophones and Francophones were either married. Over 75% of all respondents were employed at the time of the survey. A greater percentage of Anglophones reported annual household incomes of over $79,000, while a greater percentage of Francophones reported annual household incomes under $80,000 (See Appendix).

3.2 Family Meal

3.2.1 Francophones (Culture)

Over 60% of Francophone men and women reported eating their main meals at home "everyday". In terms of eating main meals at the table as a family, 69% of Francophone women, and 49% of Francophone men reported eating their main meals with a family everyday of the week. Similarly, 50% of Francophone women reported having a budget for groceries, while only 36% of Francophone men reported having one (Table 1).

3.2.2 Anglophones (Culture)

This is in stark contrast with the Anglophone men and women among whom just over 35% reported eating their main meal at home “almost everyday”. In contrast, 45% of Anglophone women and 34% of Anglophone men reported eating main meals with family at the table everyday (Table 1). Findings regarding food shopping habits are presented in Table 1. Among the Anglophones, over 50% of the women and 42% of the men reported having a budget for grocery shopping.

3.3 Gender Differences

3.3.1 Women

Approximately 60% of all respondents, regardless of language group or sex, reported that meals were planned before shopping for groceries.

More than 80% of both Anglophone and Francophone women reported using a written grocery list, while around 70% of men also reported using a list. In terms of selecting foods based on nutrition labels (Table 1), over 70% of Anglophone and Francophone women reported that, when grocery shopping, nutrition labels were sometimes used to select foods. More than 50% of Francophone women and 46% of Anglophone women said they “can prepare most dishes” and approximately 13% said they “frequently prepare sophisticated dishes”. In terms of types of foods used most often when preparing a main meal at home, a very high percentage (81%) of Francophone women reported using “whole basic foods, such as vegetables, fruits, pasta, legumes and meat”, while just over 73% of Anglophone women chose the same response.

3.3.2 Men

However, only 62% of Anglophone men and 52% of Francophone men reported selecting foods based on nutritional information. In contrast, only about 30% of Anglophone and Francophone men reported that they could prepare most dishes. More Anglophone men (30%) than Francophone men (19%) were confident that they could “cook most dishes, if they had a recipe”. An important difference was also observed for the category “use a mix of whole, basic foods and easy to prepare foods”. Percentages were above 23% among Anglophones and below 18% among Francophones. Francophone men, however, had the highest percentage reporting that they mostly “buy ready-to-eat food or order takeout or delivery” for their main meals.

3.4 Minutes Eating Meals

Total distribution of minutes for meal at home among Anglophone and Francophone men and women are presented in Graph 1. In this part, both language (culture) and gender (men and women) were considered. The results showed that Francophones spent more minutes eating meals at home. Further, the increasing trend was observed for least amount of time spent (0-15 min) for meals at home from 1992 to 2010.

Table 1. Family Meals Characteristics of both Anglophone and Francophone Men and Women

	Anglophone Men	Francophone men	Anglophone women	Francophone women
Eat main meal at home				
2= Every day	34.8	61.8	38.9	67.1
1=Two or more times per week	62.4	36.3	59.8	31.5
0= About once a week/never	2.8	1.9	1.3	1.4
Eat main meal with family at the table				
2=Everyday	34.4	49.4	45.2	69.0
1= Two or more times per week	56.6	46.0	44.5	30.1
0= About once a week/never	9.0	4.6	10.3	0.9
Have budget for groceries				
Yes	41.6	35.8	51.0	49.9
Use a written grocery list				
Yes	73.7	67.7	83.2	80.3
Plan meals before going to the store	63.5	56.8	65.5	60.4
Select foods based on nutrition labels?				
Yes	61.8	52.0	61.8	71.3
Personal cooking abilities				
I do not know where to start	2.7	0.4	3.4	0.6
I can do things such as boil an egg	6.5	1.5	5.5	2.0
I can prepare simple meals	22.1	11.9	29.5	12.1
I can cook, if I have a recipe	30.1	27.4	19.4	20.8
I can prepare most dishes	30.8	45.9	32.0	51.3
Frequently prepare sophisticated dishes	7.8	12.9	10.2	13.2
Types of foods for meal preparation				
Whole, basic foods (veg, fruit, meat, etc.)	69.0	73.2	75.0	81.4
Mix whole & easy to prepare foods	26.6	23.1	18.0	14.9
Buy ready-to eat take-out food	4.4	3.7	7.0	3.7
N	7,669,590	2,852,031	7,954,329	2,970,248

Source: Micro-Data Analysis of the Canadian Community Health Survey: Rapid Response FS1, 2012.

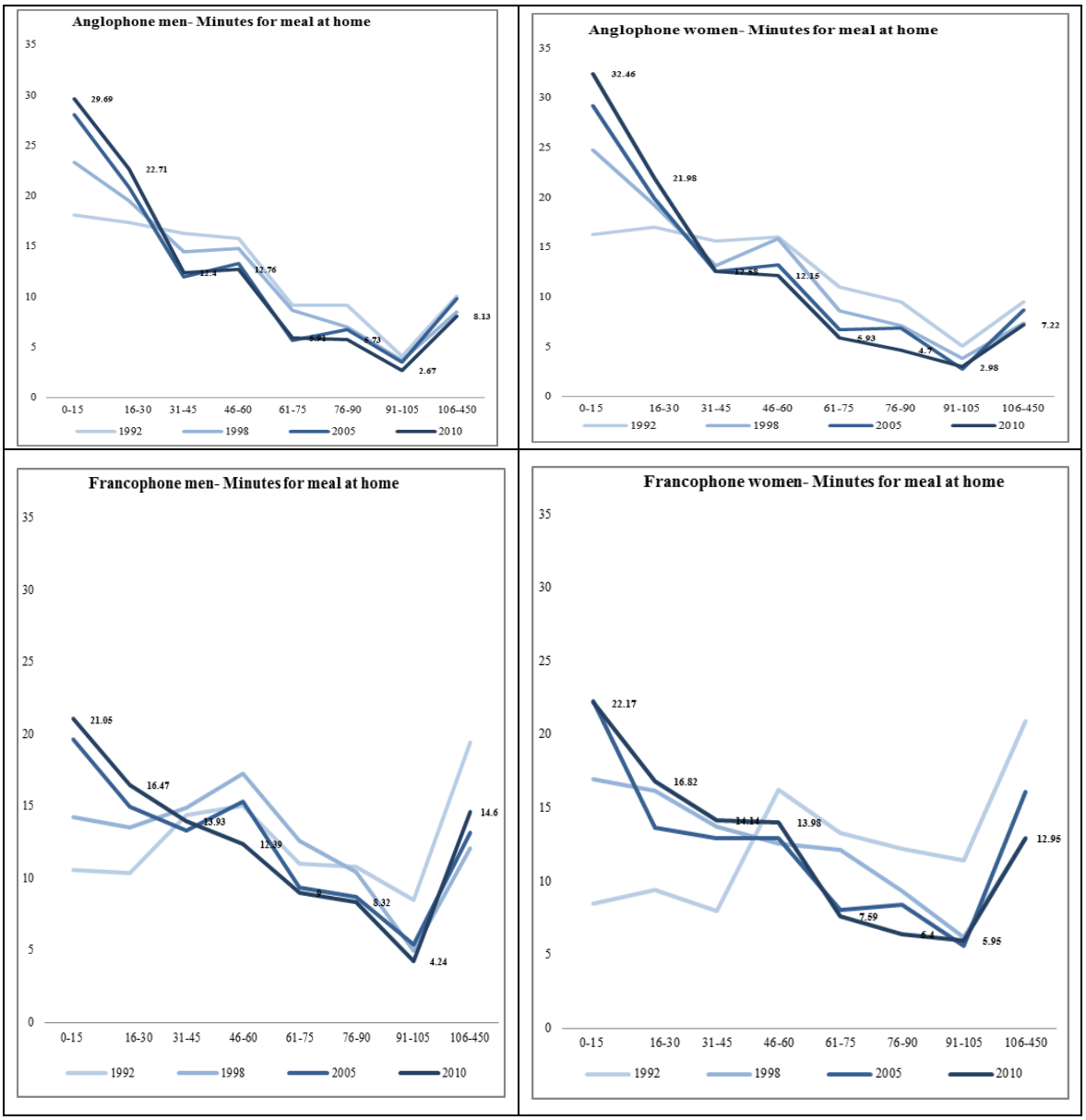

Figure 1. Percentage of Anglophone and Francophone Men and Women (Total Min Spent on Meal at Home

Source: Micro-Data Analysis of General Social Survey, Time Use, 1992, 1998, 2005, 2010.

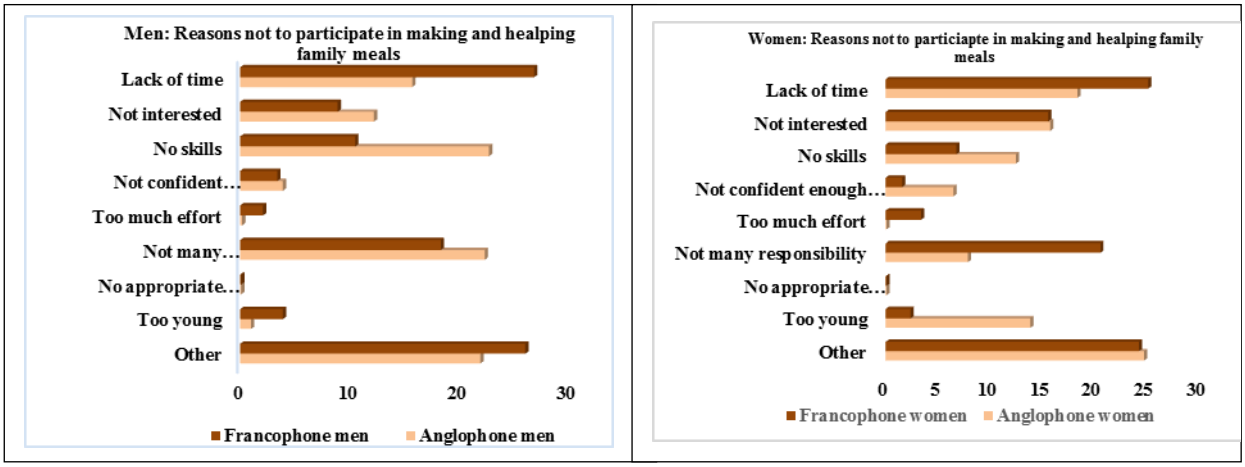

Figure 2. Percentage (%) of Anglophone and Francophone Men and Women by the Main Reason They Rarely or Never Prepare or Help to Prepare Meals

Source: Micro-Data Analysis of the Canadian Community Health Survey: Rapid Response FS1, 2012.

When asked about the one main reason for not being contributed in making or helping to make meals, 22% or more of the respondents, irrespective of language group or gender, proffered reasons "other" than those that were given by the Food Skills questionnaire (Graph 2). Over 18% of both Anglophone and Francophone men reported that meal preparation was "not their responsibility". Anglophone men were more likely to report that they had "no cooking skills" (22%), while Francophone men were more likely to report "lack of time" as their main reason for limited participation in meal preparation. Francophone women with limited meal participation gave similar responses to those given by Francophone men: "lack of time" (16%) and "not their responsibility" (23%). In contrast, over 15% of Anglophone women reported that "lack of interest" was their main reason for being less contribution in meal preparation.

Table 2. One-Way Anova-Test, Time Spent on Meal at Home by Socioeconomic Factors

			Anglophones	Francophones	A-F
Gender	Female	Mean	47.79	62.92	***
		(S.D)	53.91	52.82	
	Male	Mean	51.64	63.43	***
		(S.D)	53.71	54.45	
		Anova	***	n.s	
Age groups	15-19	Mean	27.28	37.73	***
		(S.D)	35.44	33.89	
	20-29	Mean	31.03	45.01	***
		(S.D)	38.32	39.45	
	30-49	Mean	39.80	53.19	***
		(S.D)	44.28	49.96	
	50-64	Mean	50.33	69.91	***
		(S.D)	50.30	56.05	
	65-high	Mean	74.14	80.63	
		(S.D)	68.22	56.16	***
		Anova	***	***	
Marital	Single	Mean	33.93	46.59	***
		(S.D)	44.95	47.09	
	Wid/div/sep	Mean	53.83	61.81	***
		(S.D)	66.30	50.09	
	Married	Mean	53.73	70.88	***
		(S.D)	50.83	55.73	
		Anova	***	***	
Education	Doctorate/MS/Bach	Mean	51.40	64.59	***
		(S.D)	59.38	56.04	
	Diplomas/Certificates	Mean	46.69	61.09	***
		(S.D)	44.77	51.61	
	Some uni/commm coll	Mean	48.94	54.92	***
		(S.D)	49.73	50.90	
	High school diploma	Mean	49.73	64.83	***
		(S.D)	54.85	54.39	
	Some sec/elementary/no school	Mean	51.86	67.94	***
		(S.D)	54.23	54.44	
		Anova	**	*	

Income	$0–$29,999	Mean	54.36	63.31	***
		(S.D)	62.42	48.49	
	$30,000–$49,999	Mean	53.01	68.19	***
		(S.D)	58.86	52.66	
	$50,000–$79,000	Mean	48.39	61.41	***
		(S.D)	48.91	53.98	
	$80,000–$99,999	Mean	45.48	64.67	***
		(S.D)	47.98	57.06	
	$100,000 or more	Mean	44.00	58.22	***
		(S.D)	47.32	53.05	
		Anova	***	n.s	

Source: Micro-Data Analysis of the General Social Survey. 2010.

Table 3. Unadjusted and Adjusted Linear Regression Analyses between Time Spent Meals at Home and Socioeconomic Characteristics

		Unadjusted		Adjusted	
		Beta	**Sig**	**Beta**	**Sig**
Socioeconomic characteristics	Language (1=Anglophones; 2= Francophone)	0.100	0.000	0.099	0.000
	Sex (1=Male; 2= Female)	0.022	0.007	0.037	0.000
	Age	0.257	0.000	0.262	0.000
	Education	0.018	0.026	0.006	0.457
	Marital (0=single; 1: sep/wid/div 2=married)	0.138	0.000		
	Income	-0.083	0.000		

Chi-Square Significance: *= $p<0.05$; **= $p<0.01$; ***= $p<0.001$; n. s. not significant at the threshold of 0.05
Due to collinearity income and marital status were dropped from regression analyses

Source: Micro-data analysis of the General Social Survey. 2010.

Results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) between the time spent on meals at home and socio-demographic characteristics are presented in Table 2. A significant difference was found between Anglophone male and female in terms of the time they spent on meals at home. Mean of minutes eating meals for men was 51 compared to 47 for female. However, Francophones had more amount compared to Anglophone counterparts (Mean=63). The amount of time on family meals increased with increasing age among men and women, regardless to language. However, the mean of time was more among Francophones. The findings indicate that married persons compared to singles were more likely to have more amount of time in meals at home. But, there was a significant difference between the times Francophones with different marital status spent on meals at home. The analysis of variance for time

spent on meals at home and education was significant for both language groups. Also, there was no significant difference between household income levels and amount of time spent on meals among Francophones. However, Anglophones in low income families had more amount of time on family meals at home.

Findings of adjusted linear regression analyses are presented in Table 3. Results showed that Francophone spent more times in meals at home than their Anglophone counterparts. Further, a significant difference between gender and the time spent on meals at home. Female spent more times compared to male. However, age was moderately associated the time spent on meals at home.

4. Discussion

Little is known about Canadian family meal status. In this paper, we sought to investigate family meal-activities as well as frequency of Anglophones and Francophones, as two major language groups, spent on family meal in Canada. Further, it is important to note that we tended to see how eating meals in family, as an everyday activity, is constructed in Canada, as a modern country, between both language groups. This article used a quantitative approach by using data from 2012 CCHS: RR-FSK1, and GSS (Time Use) from 1992 to 2010. Significance of addressing to family meal in Canada between Anglo and Franco-Canadians was the lack of enough studies in this regard. We sought to see if there is the difference between both groups in Canada.

As discussed at the beginning of this article, Sobal, Warde and Fischler, argued that individuals, in spite of not being absolutely autonomous, do not seem to follow fully cultural values in contemporary era. Although they try to choose their preferences freely, but they still surrounded by norms and values (Bourdieu, 1984). Fichler (1988), inspired by Durkheim' concept of Anomie, conceptualizes a key concept is called "Gastro-anomy". It refers to the contemporary era which in individuals' eating are not fully affected by cultural norms and rules. Their eating habits are uncertain, and they are alone, ill-prepared to make decision about food consumption (Kjaerns et al., 2009). So, addressing individuals' eating habits and family meal status are important in Canada to see the changes in the last two decades.

Regardless of language, results of this study revealed that there has been a marked decline in more minutes eating meals in family since 1992 to 2010. However, family meals were still frequent among Anglophones and Francophones.

Notably, we found that Francophones spent more minutes eating main meals in home and with family compared to their Anglophones counterparts. Francophone men and women reported greater use of whole, basic foods when preparing their main meals at home.

In terms of major reason for not participating in family meal, "lack of time" was only reason of both language groups in Canada. It is consistent with nature of contemporary era which in individuals due to the types of employment spent low minutes eating meals at home.

In consideration of gender, the literature has indicated that the leading role of women in families is often taken for granted; it is assumed that they can prepare healthy foods to improve family health. Although, highlighting the role of women in contemporary meal preparation should not be seen as an attempt to reproduce traditional gender roles, but as merely reflecting the key role that women continue to play in the construction and maintenance of family (Dixey, 1996). Kitchen and domestic affairs were historically managed mostly by women, and their entrance into wage labor markets transformed cooking into a shared responsibility for both men and women (Harnack et al., 1998). Further, some evidence has shown that most of the work done within the home continues to fall heavily on the shoulders of women (Williams-Forson, 2010). We found that women were more responsible for making meals at home. However, men, in general, have continued to argue that their lack of time and employment engagement cause them to remain less in family meal preparation (Warde & Martens, 2001). Thus, the findings of this study are consistent with the literature. Men were participating less than women in making meal. In fact, the kitchen also continues to reflect women's roles and gender identity (Le Dantec-Lowry, 2008).

The findings from this study corroborate that there are enduring differences into the early 21st century between men's and women's roles in the management of meals within the home in Canada between French and English Canadians. In terms of age, the findings indicate that amount of time on family meals increased with increasing age among men and women, regardless to language.

In terms of the strengths and limitations, lack of new data is the major limitation of the current study. Due to the importance of dinner for families we just used self-reported questions of family meals. Using qualitative and in-depth interviews are required to identify the role of family meal among Anglophones and Francohones. We found that Francophone' women reported more minutes eating meals at home. As future research, exploring Francophone' women's reasons for participating in family meal is suggested.

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Notes

Note 1 Little is known about family meal studies in Canada between English and French-speaking people; so, I just mentioned to this reference.

Note 2 Main meal was defined for respondents as being the meal that requires the most preparation.

Note 3 To create descriptive variables, data from CCHS: Rapid Response-Food Skills 1 were used.

Appendix

Table 4. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Weighted Sample of Canadian Anglophones and Francophones (%)

	Anglophone	Francophone
Sex of respondents		
Male	49.1	49.0
Female	50.9	51.0
Highest level of education		
Less than High School Diploma	1.1	5.0
High School Diploma or Equivalent	8.7	9.7
Certificate or Diploma	17.0	23.6
College, Cégep or other non-university certificate	33.3	27.3
Uni. Certificate or Dip. Below Bachelor's Degree	6.3	7.7
Bachelor's Degree (EG. BA. B.SC. JL)	22.8	16.7
Uni. Certificate, Diploma or Degree above Bach.	10.8	10.0
Marital status		
Married or common-law	54.8	55.8
Widowed. Separated. Divorced	12.0	15.3
Single	33.2	28.9
Family income		
$ 0 – $29,999	13.6	20.2
$ 30,000 – $49,999	16.5	19.8
$ 50,000 – $79,000	23.7	27.0
$ 80,000 – $99,999	11.3	10.4
$100,000 or more	34.9	22.6

N	**15,**623**,918**	**5,**822**,279**

Source: Micro-Data Analysis of the Canadian Community Health Survey: Rapid Response: FS1, 2012.

Normalizing weight: Normalizing weights is not necessary when analysts use computer software (i.e., STATA) capable of correctly accounting for the survey design in an analysis and when suitable survey design information is available to the analyst. If analysts have a survey weight and corresponding bootstrap weights, and if they have appropriate analytical software for survey data, there is no reason to perform any weight normalization. This means that the survey weight of each respondent in a subpopulation being analyzed is divided by the mean of the survey weights for all members of the sample in the subpopulation (Gagne et al., 2011).